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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the changing purposes of United States education from the colonial era to the 1980s. Current educational philosophy is described as rooted in custodialism, whose growth and development are explored through an assessment of: (1) the shifting foundations of public education; (2) neighborhood-centered, parent-directed, and professionally-assisted schools; (3) the roles of the home, church, and school; (4) public school development; and (5) changes affecting public schools. Custodialism is criticized for perceiving students as possessions instead of persons and is characterized as dominated by authority traits rather than service orientations. (JHP)

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CHAPTER 5.

THE EMERGENCE OF CUSTODIALISM

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Huston Smith has observed that it is "...our modern Western world view ...that (a) nothing that lacks a material component exists, and (b) in what does exist the physical component has the final say."[1] He maintains the view is more entrenched at the conclusion of the 20th Century than at the beginning inspite of the fact "...that the science that lured us into this world view now seems to be abandoning it."[2]

There is an uneasiness created when no one seems to quite know what mass and energy really is - especially when our society is built around conceptual systems for examining, analyzing and controlling that substance and largely ignores everything else. The Spook, Smith says, is in

> the message that reaches us from frontier physics (where it) seems...that the further we track matter toward its casual origins, the more it sheds the attributes...that our senses register, until at some vanishing point on the horizon it seems to drop these attributes altogether to become something we can scarcely guess.[3]

When Western Culture rejected the Biblical idea that man can be understood best by viewing him spiritually through the eyes of his Superior, and substituted the notion that truth would come from systematically searching the inferior with temporal eyes alone, it made a monumental leap. The farmer's observation on the grasshopper, "Its great on distance, but hell on direction," may reflect the increasing disenchantment some are feeling with the reductionist view. Contemporary society has seemed convinced that higher forms come after and out of lower forms; the rational ego after and out of the irrational id; the classless society after and out of class struggle. Such thinking, exemplified by Darwin, Marx, Freud and so many others, may be popular but it may not be true. More may not have always come from less and better from worse. And to continuously and exclusively search that reductionist line may be an exercise that is not only futile but perhaps fatal as Alexander Solzhenitzen seems to suggest.[4]

American Education - A Prime Exhibit

The issue of premises and their relationship to morality need not be confined to such abstract thought, however. The conclusion of the previous section of this paper on moral foundations and modern education suggested that one concrete illustration may be the declination of United States education. Our cathedrals of learning have become largely citidals of secularism. The bitter accusation of W.B. Riley in the 1920's that "Liberal bandits" were robbing the fundamentalists of billions of dollars in real estate and facilities was an expression of real feeling. He ventured that "ninety-nine out of every hundred" dollars spent to construct the great denominational universities, colleges, schools, seminaries, hospitals and publication societies in this country "...were given by fundamentalists and filched by modernists. It took hundreds of years to collect this money and construct these institutions. It has taken only a quarter of a century for the liberal bandits to capture them..."[5]

One does not need to side with the fundamentalists to recognize that the change in proprietors of our educational institutions has marked a change in our moral and ethical concerns. Examining such a change reveals the practical consequences of separating man from his spiritual origins. The drift in purpose is clearly represented in the chain-like sequence of adjustments that have occured in our answers to the question: Why has America wanted to teach her children? I am intentionally calling attention to the "Why?" rather than the "What?" The motive, more than the content is the focus in this paper. Curriculum is related, but deserves its own discussion.

Snapshots of the Past

American education seems to have been consistently powered by a pair of dominant purposes - one major and one minor. In the course of time each minor purpose has replaced the major purpose and a new successor has surfaced. Like succeeding waves, these billowing intentions have rolled across the American scene. Educational efforts have been judged right or wrong, desirable or undesirable in light of these directional thrusts.

In colonial times the major aim, eternal salvation, was yoked to a minor theme viz. establishing a free nation. Following Independence in 1776, the focus on eternal salvation slipped into oblivion. The idea of building a free nation moved center stage. The newcomer that surfaced to assume the supporting role was patriotism and citizenship. By 1850 the United States knew herself and her boundaries. Then Civil conflict erupted and a war was fought. Patriotism and citizenship were quickly placed in the spotlight of education. Industrial Expansion followed the Civil War and career training for industry was nurtured as the emerging educational concern. As World War II ended so did the emphasis on patriotism and citizenship. New economics, increasing affluence and expanding technology soon made career training the dominant theme. The stage was set with good times, abundant leisure and high mobility. The

more people had, the more they craved and circumstances did little

The Moral Intent of American Education

Period	Purposes
Colonial	A. Eternal Salvation B. Establishing a Free Nation
1750-1850	A. Establishing a Free Nation B. Cultivating Patriotism and Citizenship
1850-1950	A. Cultivating Training for Industry B. Career Training for Industry
1950-1980	A. Career Training for Industry B. Custodialism
1980-Future	A. ? B. ?

(Figure 1)

to circumscribe increased appetites. A pervasive custodialism fueled by a fervor for social justice groomed itself as successor to the throne of educational purpose.

Both parents and society requested more and more of the schools. In addition to the traditional 3 R's, teachers were increasingly expected to tend, feed, socialize, and provide psychological, medical and recreational services for the students. In response to their new assignments, educators organized themselves and demanded better facilities, more personnel and increased salaries. The control over funding rapidly centralized, moving upward and away from the local patrons.

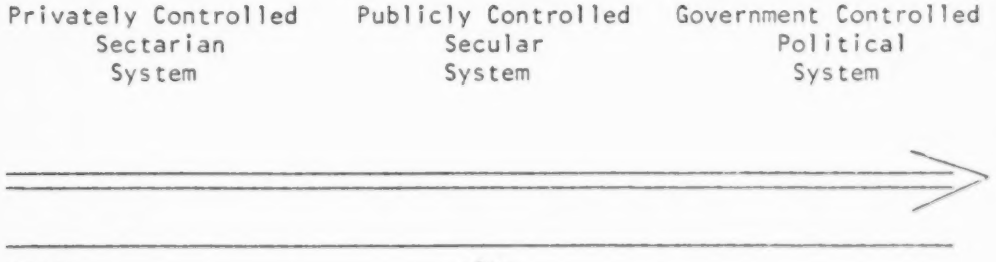
The distributors of the funds in these new state and federal distribution centers responded to the prevailing political influences demanding various forms of social and economic equality. Social justice enthusiasts embraced the school system as a natural and useful device for rectifying both economic and social inequities. Equilization of funding, integrated classrooms, ussing legislation, Title IX restrictions on sexism, public law 94-142 with its emphasis on Individualization and numerous other similar policy type guidelines and regulations fell like a sticky web over public education. Increased emphasis was placed on the school's responsibility to not only watch over the nation's children for the parents, but to watch over the social problems in the nation. Administering a quick cure never really appeared to be the expectation--that would have been naive. But, a type of social satisfaction seemed to occur merely from placing these various functions and challenges in the custody of the schools. The era of custodialism stood firmly in the doorway to America's educational future.

For more than three hundred years now American education has been shaped and reshaped by this series of prevailing moral intentions. (See Figure 1) In a kaleidoscopic fashion, these changing educational aims and purposes have emerged and melted away. Structure and content have been fashioned and blended to match these moods. Now to the threshold comes this new theme. Custodialism presents itself as the latest answer to the question: Why has America wanted to educate her children? For some, the new mood seems to be a cradle harolding a new and better future. For others, it looks like a casket harboring the remains of what was once a vital, healthy program. Whether custodialism is the seminal source of an evolving utopia or a seed of self destruction, may be the key value question in contemporary education.

The Shifting Foundations of Public Education

A second question: How has America organized herself to teach her children? also spotlights an interesting and unique panorama. As indicated above, the moral intent of American schools has changed markedly over the past 300 years. These changes have yeilded great influence upon not only intent, but content and process, and on administrative and organizational structure as well. America has moved from a privately controlled, sectarian system to a publicly controlled secular system and some feel was well on her way to creating a Government controlled, political system of education until the Reagan Administration removed the foot from the accelerator pedal of Federal finance. (See Figure 2)

Changing Systems of American Education

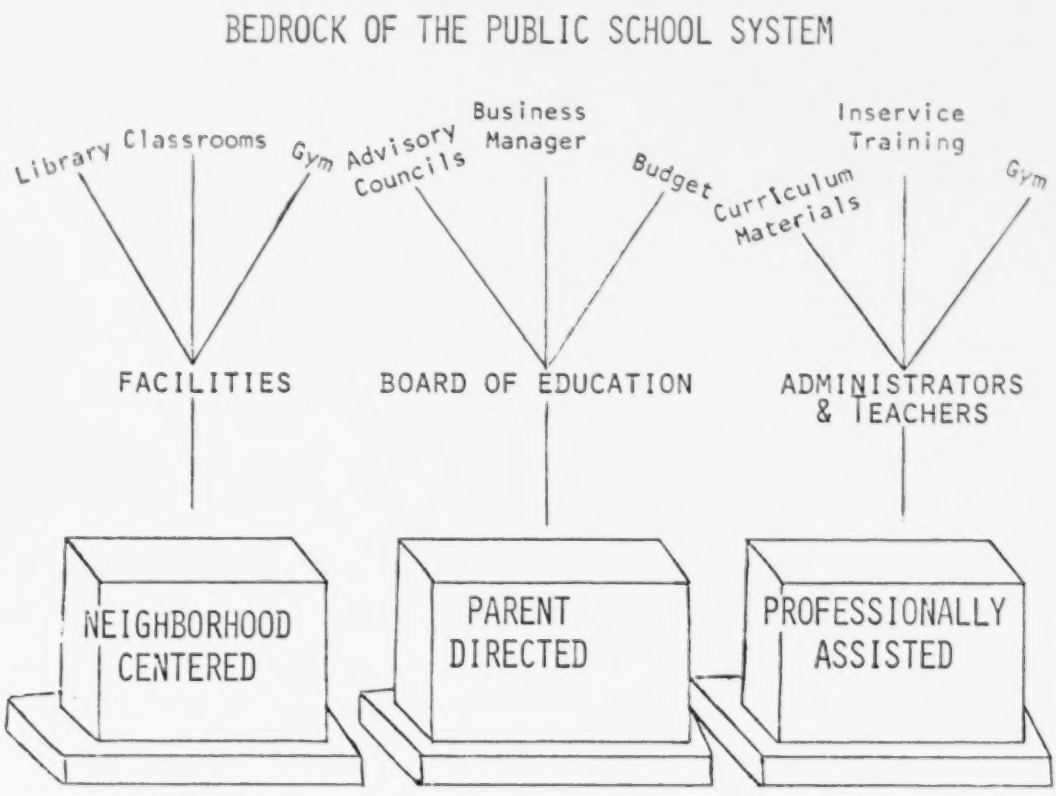


(Figure 2)

Neighborhood-centered, Parent-directed, Professionally Assisted

The original foundation for public education in America might be expressed in the phrase, neighborhood-centered, parent directed, and professionally-assisted. The school facility is located in the neighborhood. The parents, as citizens, are empowered by law to authorize and direct the educational program through an elected board and community

advisory councils as mandated or needed. Profesionally-trained personnel are employed by the citizenry through the board to serve the citizenry. Some observers feel that forces which seriously damage these pilings of the public school system may threaten its continued existence. (See Figure 3) One reason for such feelings is the unique relationship that has traditionally existed between the home, the church and the school in America--the way they have shared common moral concerns.



(Figure 3)

Home, Church and School

The fundamental unit of society has traditionally been the home, In the home, with parents and children, resides the nucleus of social interaction, authority and responsibility. The rights of the individual find nurture and protection first with his or her parents in the family setting. It is the home that is most commonly acknowledged as the fundamental governing agency for humanity. The home envelops nearly all functions that eventually appear as specialties of society. It provides food services, dormitory facilities, recreation, education, medical treatment, labor assignments, cultural experiences, and nearly all the common services. Most of the institutions that have developed in society, including the church and the school, were originally conceived as service agencies to assist the home in meeting its needs.

No other institution or agency has ever been able to adequately take its place or fulfill its essential functions. Some agencies, however, have fulfilled very important supporting roles. Two of these are the church and the school. The church has assisted the home by providing an interpretation of the spiritual domain and some help on how best to make sure of that domain to benefit the family. The school has assisted the home by providing more effective ways of developing useful skills that benefit the family both intrinsically and socially. In this context both the church and the school are servants to the home. They have no inherent rights, consequently, to impose by force anything onto the family that the family does not want. Compulsory education, schooling and attendance legislation, however, have placed the school in a powerful and sometimes intimidating role relationship with the family. The Yoder case in Wisconsin (1972) and the Singer case in Utah (1978) are symbolic examples of conflict over parent versus states rights in the education of children.) It is the role of church and school, however, to call attention to undesireable circumstances that jeopardize individual, family and social welfare.

Development of Public Schools

For the first 150 years early Americans supported private sectarian school systems to assist them in educating their children. During the past 150 years U.S. citizens have moved away from these private, sectarian school systems toward public, secular school systems. The primary difference between these two approaches to education is largely in the perceptual bonds that create unity within the system. Where sectarianism depended upon some form of religious theology for its continued existence, the cohesion and sustenance of the secular program has been some form of moral idealism. The public school system seems to have been exceedingly successful in America because of the unique moral structure associated with this nation's founding documents. The experience of early immigrants to America provided a positive basis for optimism toward the public school retaining a moral fiber apart from the church. Lutherans had come from Germany, Catholics from Yugoslavia, Jews from Russia, Episcopalians from England, Quakers from Scotland, etc. Members of these sects and nationalities had found themselves sitting in different chapels, each feeling the uniqueness of their own nationality and their own religion yet somehow sharing a common moral bond that made them Americans. Surely the essence of this moral affinity could be identified, packaged and passed on to succeeding generations in a nonsectarian, secular program of education! Optimism prevailed. This shared morality has provided the necessary consensus to fund and promote the most succesful and widely distributed educational program in history. The ever increasing dominance of the materialism Huston Smith speaks of, however, has gradually eroded this moral fabric in American society. As Walter Lippmann observed in the 1920's, the acids of modernity dissolved the ancestral order.[7]

Recent indications are that the growth and effectiveness curves of the public school system have diminished and in some instances dipped rather sharply. Social forces and practices have tampered sufficiently with the

neighborhood-centered, parent-directed and professionally-assisted pilings of public education to pose a threat to its continued existence. The concern is not that education would be destroyed; education shall continue to exist in some form. The concern is whether or not the system that has been so effective in the past can be preserved for present and future service. This may be possible. Some feel this is not probable if certain trends continue--trends that are creating financial pressures and divisive moral conflicts over controls and values.

As orginally implemented, the public school in America was conceived as an employee hired by the home through a local school board which in turn was supported by local and state governments that are also service agencies created and sustained by residents of the home. During the past few decades of materialistic focus, circumstances, legislation and practices related to the home and its educational services have been drastically altered. Powerful forces still at work are rearranging our social topography. Public education is being influenced by these forces. The emerging custodial mood is growing stronger.

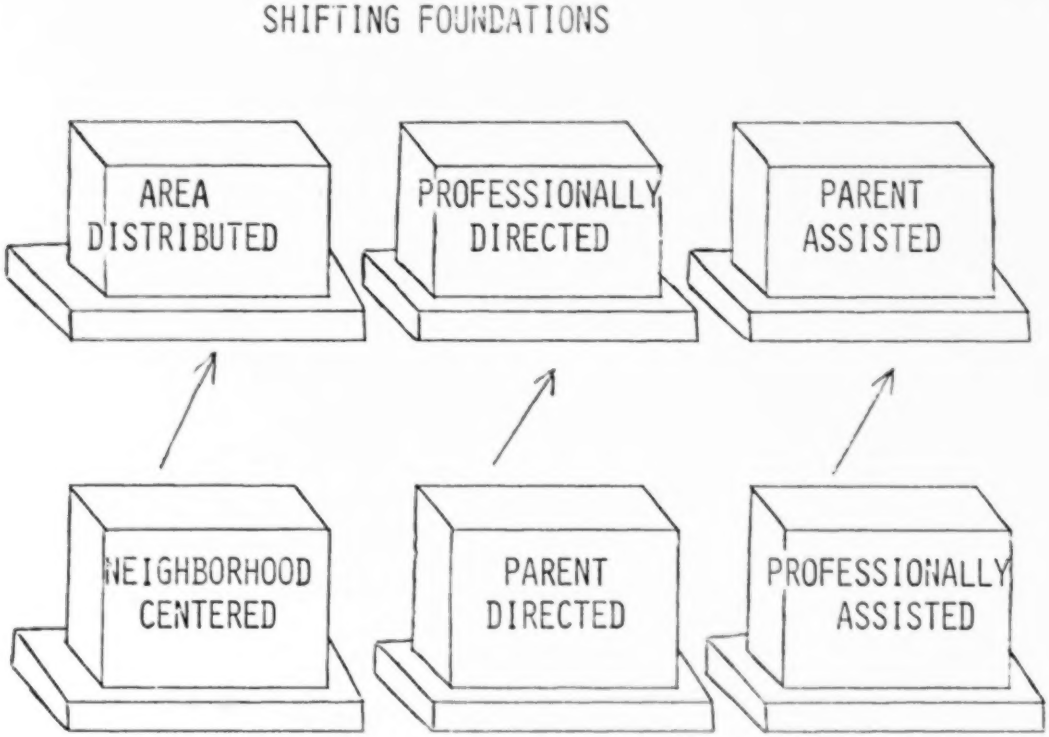
Changes Affecting the Public Schools

In a number of ways the home appears to have recently abdicated many of its responsibilities. In turn, the public schools have been expected to do many things schools were not designed to do and perhaps are incapable of doing. This attempted shift in responsibility has been met by educators with increased organization and demands for more money. The rapid growth in student enrollments and increased requirements associated with professional training of educators have also had their impact. Lay boards, preoccupied with providing physical facilities and expanded services for the growing student body, have tended to relinquish many of their directing powers to formally trained, credentialed employees. New policies and practices have been fostered. Public education has been bureaucratized. Power, authority and responsibility are being rearranged. Decision-making powers have fled upward and outward along with the changing channels of finance. For example, Federal aid to education increased from about 300 million in 1958 to some 13 billion in 1978--a 4300 percent increase in 20 years.

Social legislation, such as bussing requirements and some consolidation policies, have likewise disrupted the idea of a neighborhood school facility. Regulations regarding the receipt of Federal and state monies have also modified curriculum programs and personnel hiring policies. In some areas the traditional pilings of neighborhood-centered, parent-directed and professionally-assisted are rapidly being replaced with area-distributed, professionally-directed and parent-assisted educational programs. (See Figure 4) This process may be ripping the morality out of America's secular, educational program. Conflict, contention and public dissatisfaction with public education is increasing. If this trend continues the public school system may eventually decay and eventually self-destruct.

The Weaknesses of Custodialism

Beneath the arguments over preference as to the most ideal position on the continuum illustrated in Figure 2 is this more fundamental question about purpose. That is, can any system of education survive if its dominant purpose is custodialism? Custodialism is a natural product of materialism. It must view students as things not persons, possessions not patrons. Custodial functions by their very nature are also encompassing and inclusive, permeating and pervasive. The care, preservation and maintenance notion inherent in custodialism



(Figure 4)

is far more inclusive than it is restrictive, more dominated by possession than service, more characterized by gathering in than giving away.

If it is the schools purpose, therefore, to assume custodial responsibility for the child's needs or for the nation's ills, how does one invoke limitations? What is there to prevent the definition from embracing the word "all"--all the child's needs, all the nation's ills? In the midst of America's legion of lobbies, who is to determine delimitations. The custodial philosophy says: It is I, for that is my role and expertise." This quickly raises the issue of authority.

Naturally, school personnel resist receiving responsibility without

the accordance of commensurate authority. But authority means power and the pervasive nature of custodialism tends to demand pervasive power. (Remember the last time you tried to get a restricted key from a custodian or even a non-restricted key?) How else can it preserve, maintain and protect? This expectation and sometimes demand for power and control will ultimately bring education into conflict with other institutions such as the family, the community and the church. It is highly unlikely these institutions will be willing to grant an educational system fueled by a custodial philosophy all it is likely to demand--especially when its performance is preservative rather than productive.

Custodial education is characterized by wanting more and more to embrace increasing amounts of that which it must do little or nothing about. Otherwise it destroys its own purpose for existence; it eliminates that which it was charged to preserve. When a custodial system diminishes or changes that which it embraces it ceases to be custodial--to be a caretaker and preserver. An educational program dominated by custodialism may well become a model of stagnation and a constant threat to institutions requiring growth, dynamics and freedom. Consider for example, the expansion of educational curriculum during the past few years. What began as extra-curricular activities soon became co-curricular and finally curricular. Literally hundreds of functions have been added to American Public Education, hardly anything has been dropped. Even subjects like farm mechanics survive with minor changes in course titles and descriptions. The IEP programs under the individualized pendulum is another example. New programs, demands and functions increase in mitotic fashion. More and more is embraced and preserved, little if anything is created, reduced or discarded. Power in the system increases, costs rise and productivity becomes a debate.

A system of educational custodialism is inevitable on a collision course with other institutions such as the family. The battle may begin on the financial plane (as contemporary headlines would indicate) but it will ultimately be fought and won or lost in the trenches of value. And the major issue will be control and dominion. A custodial educational system is structured to require support more than to render service. In addition to huge amounts of support it also demands considerable autonomy. Custodialism is a weak and diluted source of moral energy. This is true even when it huddles under the cloak of science. For as the Biologist P.B. Weisz noted:

> "...Science...must operate within carefully specified, self-imposed limits. The basic philosophic attitude must be mechanistic and causalistic and we note that the results obtained through science are inherently without truth, without value and without purpose."

Custodialism is the philosophy that is left when one severs the spiritual root that nourishes morality. The stronger such a system becomes the more subserviant other agencies and institutions must become in order for it to survive.

If career preparation slips away from public education as its dominant moral intent then custodialism will take its place by default. (There are signs that career preparation is losing its grip. Many in higher education, for example, are now feeling they may have spent too much for too long for too little when they graduate to unemployment.) No other dominant purpose besides custodialism seems to be standing in the wings waiting its turn to guide education. Furthermore, the nature of custodialism seems to be that it does not want nor will it tolerate a running mate. When that time comes modern education will become totally displaced from its moral foundations.

Footnotes

1. Huston Smith, "Beyond the Western Mind Set", Teachers College Record, Vol. 82, No. 3, Spring 1981, p. 434.

2. Ibid, p. 434.

3. Ibid, p. 435

4. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "A World Split Apart", Address Delivered at Harvard University, Cambridge Mass., June 8, 1978.

5. Walter Lippmann, A Preface to Morals (New York: MacMillan Company, 1929, p. 31.)

6. William B. Lauderdale, "Moral Intentions in the History of American Education", Theory into Practice, Vol. XIV, No. 4, pp. 264-270. Suggests a similar analysis.

7. Walter Lippman, A Preface to Morals, p. 208.

8. Inform, January 1979, No. 6, p. 2.

9. P.B. Weis, The Science of Biology, 3rd Ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967, p. 14.